

## APPLICANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

### 2013 AmeriCorps State and National Grant Competition

**Legal Applicant:** Public Allies, Inc.

**Application ID:** 13ES146983

**Program Name:** Public Allies Connecticut

For the purpose of enhancing our programs by improving the quality and quantity of applications to the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), we are providing specific feedback regarding the strengths and weaknesses of this application. These comments are not meant to represent a comprehensive assessment; rather the analysis represents those elements that had the greatest bearing on the rating of the application. Please note that this feedback consists of summary comments from more than one reviewer. For this reason, some of the comments may seem to be inconsistent or contradictory. Comments are not representative of all of the information used in the final funding decision.

#### Reviewers' Summary Comments:

- (+) The applicant presents a compelling argument that the need exists in the communities they targeted. Unemployment rates in Hartford, Bridgeport, and New Haven are as high as 16.4%, 14.3% and 13.8%.
- (+) The applicant cited that the median income of households in Connecticut has fallen amongst the lowest wage workers for two years straight.
- (+) The applicant describes that young adults between the ages of 16 and 24 are disconnected from the societal institutions that can help them transition into adulthood. In 2011, 45,000 young adults in Connecticut were not attending school, working and had no degree beyond high school.
- (+) The applicant has provided information on the severity of the needs that exist within the communities that they will be serving within the grant program. For example, they stated that Connecticut has the designation as having the largest gap between the wealthiest and poorest citizens. They also reference growing poverty levels and the falling median levels of income.
- (+) The applicant did show strong evidence that the 2008-2010 recession had a negative effect primarily on Connecticut residents living in the poorest communities versus the wealthiest residents. This was consistent with their assertions about Hartford, Bridgeport and New Haven, which showed rates of high unemployment of 16.4%, 14.3% and 13.8% respectively.
- (+) The applicant also showed in dollars and cents why 'opportunity youth' needed intervention to prevent further drain on the communities' resources.
- (+) Nonprofits have to do more with less. With the involvement of AmeriCorps members, they will be able to increase each organizations' capacity needs and enhance their ability to deliver programs and services.
- (+) Members will increase efficiency in the operations or provisions of services, increase effectiveness in the quality

of services or results of services, and increase the organization's ability to reach new target populations.

(+) The applicant described a comprehensive strategy that will utilize primarily 40 full-time AmeriCorps members to focus on capacity building and increased economic opportunity among local nonprofit organizations in multiple cities.

(+) The applicant does provide some examples of service projects completed by Members in the past, e.g., developing a step-by-step guide for high school youth to transition from residential living to post-secondary or career experience, and development of an outreach plan in collaboration with parent-leaders to increase the client base for Teach our Children programs, including presentations to community members. For recruitment, further development of the Backpack Program included refinement of the distribution mechanism, expansion to new partners, and increasing contributions and volunteers.

(+) Members who engage in the activities involving planning and implementation of a plan learn perseverance, flexibility (because sometimes plans have to change to meet the current circumstances) and delayed gratification.

(+) The applicant provides Members with leadership skills which can be translated to any career or employment situation.

(+) The applicant serves with partner agencies, prior to Member placement, to conduct an industry standard self-assessment. This assessment helps agencies identify needs and potential roles for AmeriCorps members.

(+) In 2011-2012 Public Allies partnership organizations met and exceeded their expectations to carry out capacity-building services.

(+) The Member development program includes the best practices for serving opportunity youth. Public Allies' program design has experiential learning, coaching, and training. These are components that have documented success in helping young adults develop skills and relationships that can eliminate the barriers.

(+) The applicant has referenced the impact of the grant with statements about the impact of past programming. They indicated that 96% of their Members exceeded expectations in carrying out the capacity-building service activities.

(+) The applicant has provided information about the overall change that they envision seeing at the conclusion of the three-year cycle. Their statements about creating a model that blends community service, nonprofit capacity building, and civic engagement and leadership clearly indicates what they will do within the framework of the grant process.

(+) The applicant showed evidence, through the David and Lucile Packard Foundation survey, that investments in capacity building does positively impact organizational effectiveness around programs and services.

(+) The applicant used evidence-informed performance data from previous years to show that Member service delivery strategy does have impact.

- (+) The applicant cited research supporting the efficacy of capacity building as an effective strategy with long-term impact on service delivery.
- (-) The applicant's data was statewide rather than specific to the cities' in which they were proposing the intervention.
- (-) The applicant does not describe the need to serve disconnected youth within the community as a significant issue and does not show evidence of how these factors (engaging in criminal activities, becoming incarcerated, and relying on public systems of support) have impacted the community or are specifically tied to the financial impacts on the communities being served. They also do not explain how the significant costs associated with these issues translate into problems for the targeted communities.
- (-) Certain key demographics of the target community, such as race, ethnicity, and disability status, are not described in the application.
- (-) The community problem that the applicant is addressing lacks clarity and specificity. The applicant describes only in general terms that they will be targeting disconnected youth who are either unemployed or not in school. Yet, they also describe the purpose as building the capacity of the partnering organization and increasing the ability of the partnering organizations to reach out to new populations and to improve organizational effectiveness. The community issues and their goals are mixed and unclear.
- (-) A specific role for AmeriCorps members was not identified.
- (-) The applicant did not clarify how Member personal development plans will ensure economic opportunity given their training and professional development activities.
- (-) The applicant is very general in their descriptions about expectations for AmeriCorps members. Their references are broad based: to increase efficiency in the operations and provision of services and increase the effectiveness of services. These descriptions are difficult to understand and to interpret as to what the expectations are for the AmeriCorps members in the potential programming.
- (-) The application does not specify how the varying MSY slot types will be utilized.
- (-) The applicant references community service and civic engagement as best practice for impacting young adults however, they don't provide evidence or theories that would support this as an effective practice.